Education Advisory Board | Student Affairs Forum

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Student Groups

Custom Research Brief

Student Affairs Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Multicultural affairs staff provide diversity training and advising to student organizations. Four profiled institutions contain an office of diversity and multicultural affairs dedicated to the promotion of diversity and multicultural learning. Staff lead diversity trainings for student groups upon request. Diversity trainings increase cultural competencies and encourage students to initiate conversations about diversity within their organizations. Multicultural affairs staff also serve as formal and informal advisors to student organizations, coordinate multicultural programming, provide funding for intergroup partnerships, and recognize inclusive practices through student award ceremonies.

Administrators integrate diversity education throughout the curriculum and community to create inclusive campus environments. Administrators work with faculty to integrate lectures and workshops about diversity into classroom settings. Multicultural affairs staff encourage dialogue about diversity facilitated discussions that allow students and faculty to share unique perspectives on issues of diversity and inclusion.

Students establish 'umbrella' organizations that build diversity awareness through programming, performances, and educational events. Student group leaders often form umbrella organizations to unite student groups with diverse populations and missions. Student groups express solidarity with other organizations through the co-sponsorship of programs and events on campus.

Administrators assess diversity and inclusion through institution-wide campus climate surveys. Multicultural and diversity office staff evaluate student services and programs through surveys. Administrators also use focus groups and institutional data (e.g., demographics, student retention data) to assess the diversity and inclusivity of the institution.

Students seek organizations that provide cross-cultural experiences. While students value opportunities to bond with members of affinity groups, contacts report students increasingly seek interaction with students from different backgrounds and life experiences. Contacts note many students desire greater diversity within student groups and value the cross-cultural interaction made possible through umbrella organizations.

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2) Institutional Student-Group Support

Multicultural Affairs Offices

Establish a Multicultural Affairs Office as a Central Resource for Student Groups

Four contact institutions maintain multicultural affairs units that provide a variety of services and resources to promote diverse and inclusive campuses.

Institution B's Multicultural Affairs Office Services

Diversity Education and Training	Diversity education and training programs increase cultural competencies and equip students with communication skills to initiate dialogue about diversity within their organizations.
Advocacy	Advisors support students when they are treated unjustly. Advocates ensure that university administrators understand students' concerns and help students determine the best course of action.
Inter-Cultural Resource Center	The Inter-Cultural Resource Center (IRC) is a forum for educational and social exchange. The IRC includes meeting spaces for student organizations and a library that contains periodicals, newspapers, books, videotapes, DVDs, and journals about underrepresented populations throughout the world.
Leadership Development and Training	Leadership trainings enhance student leaders' programming and community building skills. Trainings also equip student leaders to better collaborate with other student organizations.
Inter-Cultural Programming	The Multicultural Affairs Office coordinates cultural heritage months, lectures, film screenings, and co-sponsorship of campus programs including concerts, conferences, and workshops. The office also offers funding opportunities for student organizations that develop intercultural programs.

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Offer Formal Diversity Training to Student Group Leaders to Increase Cultural Competency

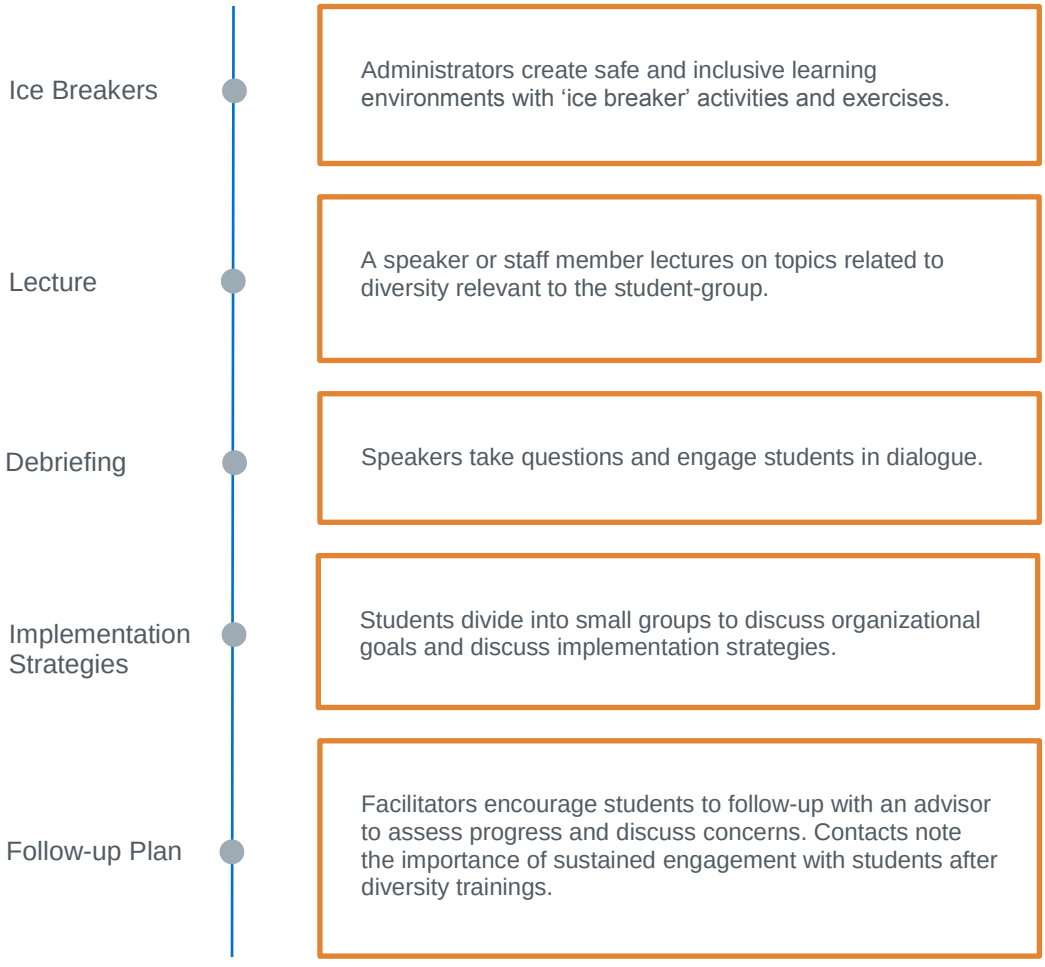
Staff lead diversity trainings for student groups upon request. Student leaders request customized trainings to meet group needs. Diversity trainings increase cultural competencies and empower students to initiate dialogue about diversity and inclusion within their organizations.

Three Types of Diversity Training Sessions

Customized Trainings	Interactive Workshops	Facilitated Discussions
Focuses on skill development (i.e., communication skills, leadership skills) and diversity awareness	Includes interactive activities and dialogue to explore a specific topic or issue	Dialogue between students explores difficult or challenging topics

The Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at **Institution D** offers a 90-minute workshop specifically for student groups. The workshop focuses on team culture building, leadership, the value of diversity within groups, and how to foster inclusive environments.

Example of a Diversity Training Session for Student Groups



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Provide Student-Groups Advisors to Support Group Missions and Goals

Administrators serve as formal and informal advisors to student-run organizations. Multicultural affairs offices typically advise student-run organizations in formal settings. At some institutions, student organizations are required to have dedicated advisors to receive funding and recognition from the university. At **Institution C**, staff in the Cultural Center advise a council comprised of the leaders of nine culturally-focused clubs. At institutions where advisors are not required, contacts note student leaders often seek informal advising from administrators about issues of diversity and inclusion. At **Institution A**, student activities staff informally advise student organizations on recruitment strategies to attract more diverse populations on campus.

	Formal Advising	Informal Advising
	▪ Advisors meet regularly with student leaders at scheduled times. ▪ Advisors work with student-leaders to create group missions and goals, and help students create strategies to achieve those goals. ▪ Advisors advocate for groups in larger campus settings.	▪ Informal advisors meet with student leaders when they have a problem. ▪ Advisors provide informal advice to student leaders regarding group missions and goals. ▪ Advisors advocate for groups in larger campus settings.
	✓ Advisors are specifically dedicated to the promotion of a group's mission. ✓ Advisors have access to resources and funding.	✓ Students truly identify with their advisor. ✓ Students feel comfortable to voice sensitive concerns in informal settings.
	× Student-leaders may not identify with the advisor provided to them	× Informal advisors may lack access to institutional resources.

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Coordinated Multicultural Programming and Events to Encourage Cross-Cultural Interaction

Multicultural affairs offices promote diversity and inclusion in student-run organizations through multicultural programming, funding for intergroup partnerships, and recognition of groups who foster inclusive environments.

Methods to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in Student Groups

Programming	Multicultural and diversity affairs office staff coordinate programming and promote interaction between student groups. Programs include heritage month events, film screenings, weekly dinners, lectures, art exhibits, dialogue series, and cultural celebrations. At **Institution A**, the Office of Multicultural Affairs collaborates with the athletics department during 'Athlete Ally Week' to raise awareness about the role of homophobia in sports.
Funding and Space	Multicultural affairs office staff provide space and funding to student-groups for intercultural programs. The office of Multicultural Affairs at **Institution A** provides funding and space for SisterCircle, a student organization that brings together diverse women of color on campus.
Recognition	Administrators recognize student organizations that achieve excellence in the promotion of diversity and inclusion on campus. Multicultural affairs staff at **Institution A** and **Institution E** hold recognition ceremonies at the end of each academic year to celebrate student success in these areas. Staff at **Institution B** present an annual 'University Diversity Award' to recognize a student organization for their contribution to the enhancement of diversity on campus.

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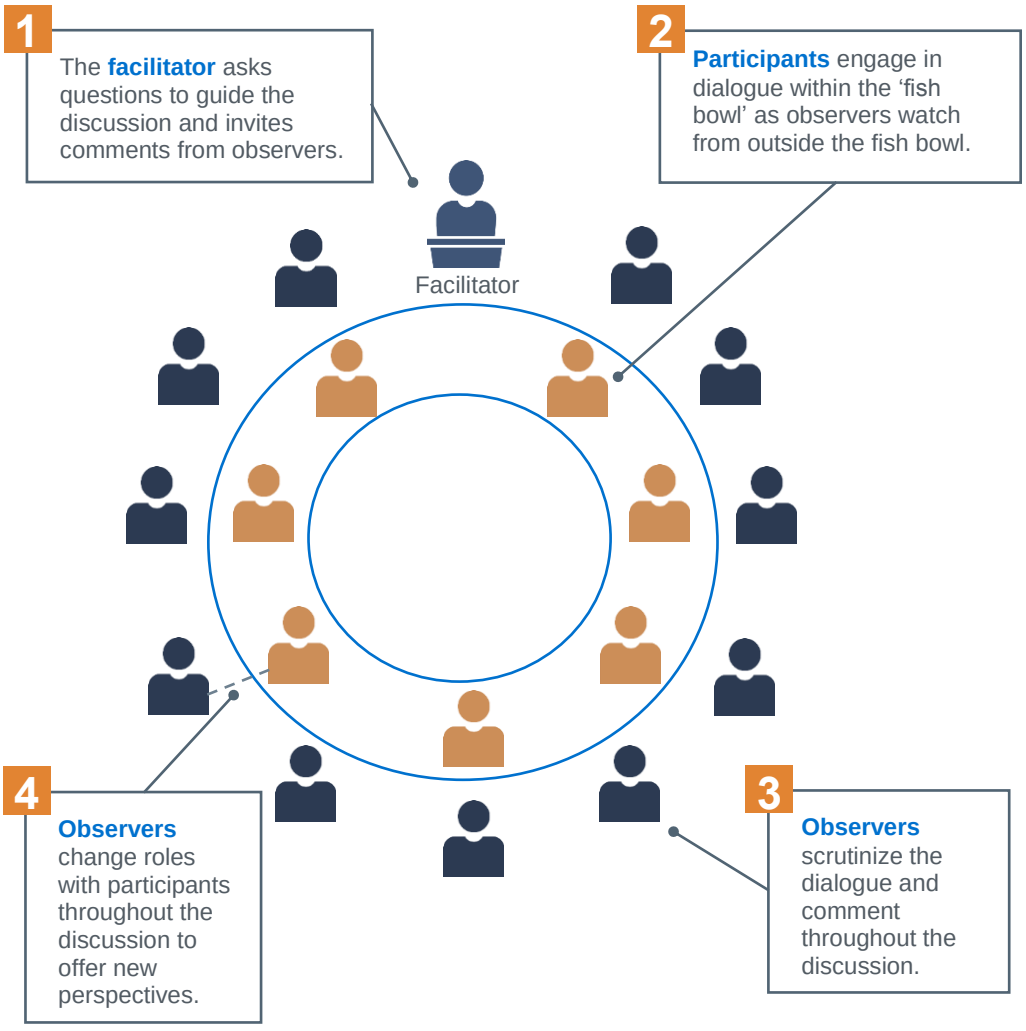
Encourage Ongoing Dialogue About Diversity and Inclusion to Promote Critical Self-Reflection

Administrators promote dialogue about diversity and inclusion through the facilitation of formal and informal discussions. Facilitated discussions allow students, faculty, and staff to share unique perspectives on issues surrounding diversity and inclusion.

Formal Dialogue at Universities

- The Office for Multicultural Learning at **Institution C** facilitates weekly two-hour sessions about identity and inclusion through the 'Difficult Dialogue Series'. Students develop mediation and conflict-resolution skills through these sessions.
- The Intercultural Center at the **Institution E** offers a 'Dialogue for Change' program to engage students in sustained discussion about difference and identity. Students, faculty, and administrators discuss new identities each week through the 'fishbowl' method of dialogue. At the end of each session, facilitators solicit feedback from participants and discuss strategies to encourage groups on campus to participate in the program.

The Fishbowl Method of Dialogue



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'Safe Space' Programs Create Open and Welcoming Environments

At **Institution C** and **Institution A**, students and administrators put rainbow flag stickers in offices and dorm rooms to signify 'safe spaces' to members of the LGBTQ community. Staff at Institution C offer 'Safe Space Training' for students to develop communication skills necessary for sensitive conversations.

Integrate Diversity Education into the University Curriculum and Community to Create Inclusive Campus Environments

Administrators integrate issues related to diversity and inclusion into the curriculum and wider campus community. Rather than create an office of diversity and inclusion, administrators at **Institution B** promote diversity through constant reinforcement of values in classrooms, residence hall meetings, and community service activities. Staff at the Intercultural Center at the **Institution E** work with faculty to create co-curricular programs and educational initiatives such as guest lectures and classroom workshops. Administrators promote broad definitions of diversity to encourage students to explore intersectionalities.

Aspects of Diversity

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3) Student-Group Practices and Initiatives

Diversity Organizations

Students Create Organizations to Initiate Dialogue and Promote Inclusive Campus Environments

Students establish organizations that promote diversity and inclusivity on campus through dialogue, performances, and educational initiatives.

Institution	Organization	Description
Institution D	Interactive Theater Carolina	▪ Social justice focused theater organization ▪ Members develop scripts on social justice issues (e.g., race, religion, gender bias) and perform plays for student groups ▪ Members create interactive dialogues for students on difficult topics
Institution B	ROOTEd (Respecting Ourselves and Others through Education)	▪ Comprised of 10-15 peer facilitators trained by the Office of Multicultural Affairs staff ▪ Peer facilitators enable informed discussions about diversity and teach anti-bias strategies to help students create inclusive communities
Institution C	Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA)	▪ Members provides support, resources, and social events to the LGTBQ community ▪ Members produce informative materials and resources for students about LGBTQ issues to promote inclusivity
Institution E	Active Minds	▪ Members host guest speakers and hold events to educate students about mental illness ▪ The organizations acts as a liaison between students with mental illnesses and Student Disability Services

Student-Group Partnerships

Students Form 'Umbrella' Organizations to Connect Groups With Diverse Missions and Populations

Student groups form 'umbrella' organizations to facilitate co-sponsorship of programs and create solidarity between groups with diverse populations. At the **Institution D**, a student-led umbrella organization called MASALA holds monthly events for student groups to socialize and share diversity and inclusion promotion practices. The Multicultural Center at **Institution C** is a student-run multicultural programming body that serves nine cultural clubs. Students maintain the multicultural center as a space for collaborative events.

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Recruitment and Engagement

Student Groups Participate In Recruitment Fairs and Organize Activities To Engage New Members

Student organizations send representatives to student group recruitment fairs at the beginning of each semester. These fairs provide an opportunity for first-year students to learn about the diversity of co-curricular activities on campus and for student-organizations to recruit new members. During the 'Week of Welcome' at the **Institution D**, student-organizations host recruitment events, activities, and performances to welcome new students and encourage participation in student-organizations. Student leaders welcome new members through engagement activities and new member education. Community service activities provide opportunities to work together and engage with community members outside the university.

Student Engagement Activities

- Group goal setting sessions
- Mentorships (Big-Little Systems)
- Group retreat weekends
- Weekly dinners
- Community service activities
- New member education

4) Assessment and Outcomes

Diversity Assessments

University administrators create councils to administer surveys and analyze responses. In some cases, administrators hire outside organizations to conduct surveys.

Conduct Climate Surveys To Assess Campus Diversity And Inclusivity

Universities conduct surveys that assess institutional climates among faculty, students, and staff. Beyond collecting purely demographic information, climate surveys provide insight into potential biases and discrimination, grievances of underrepresented populations, and areas in need of improvement. Surveys often include open-ended sections for students and staff to offer personal experiences and suggestions for change. From 2003-2007, administrators at **Institution C** assessed the university's diversity initiatives and outcomes funded through the 'Building Partnerships for Diversity' grant. The evaluation team—which included faculty members trained in evaluation research, undergraduate student research assistants, and campus units such as admissions, institutional research, and student records—gathered data and performed focus groups to evaluate diversity outcomes at Institution C.

Methods of Assessment

Focus Groups	Data Collection	Program Surveys
Multicultural and diversity affairs staff conduct focus groups to collect qualitative data regarding satisfaction with diversity and inclusion on campus.	Multicultural and diversity affairs staff collect data on the number and identity of participants attending events and participating in programs to detect underrepresented populations.	Multicultural and diversity affairs staff conduct surveys regarding student satisfaction with programming and opportunities.

Residency Checklist at Institution C

At **Institution C**, the student leaders of the multicultural center conduct annual assessments of the nine cultural clubs under their purview. Each year, these leaders create a 'residency checklist' that includes goals for each group to accomplish. At the end of each academic year, the leaders grade each organization based on their success with these goals and provide feedback on improvement.

Trends & Considerations

"The feedback we get from students is that student groups are too siloed. They enjoy bonding over shared experiences within affinity groups, but they seek more opportunities for cross-cultural interaction."

-Forum Interview

Students Seek Organizations that Offer Unique Cross-Cultural Experiences

Contacts note students increasingly seek cross-cultural experiences and interaction with diverse populations on campus. While all contacts emphasize the importance of affinity-based student organizations, intercultural groups and cross-group partnerships have an increasingly large presence on campuses. Student group partnerships and umbrella organizations provide cultural experiences while allowing students to retain membership in affinity-based organizations.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do students and administrators define diversity in the context of student groups?
- How do administrators mandate or encourage diversity within student groups?
- How do administrators communicate with student leaders about diversity within their organizations?
- How do administrators support student leaders (e.g., funding, programmatic endorsement) in the promotion of diversity within their organizations?
- What practices do student leaders employ to create diverse and inclusive organizations?
- How do practices vary across types of student groups (e.g., athletic teams, Greek organizations, cultural groups)?
- How do student leaders create safe and welcoming environments for current and prospective group members?
- How do student groups facilitate inclusive recruitment processes?
- To what extent do administrators encourage inter-group collaboration as a way to promote diversity?
- How do students and administrators evaluate the effectiveness of student group diversity initiatives?
- To what extent do student leaders use feedback from group members about diversity?
- What initiatives have students or administrators launched in recent years to promote diverse and inclusive student groups?
- How satisfied are students with the level of diversity and inclusion within student groups?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (www.eab.com)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Diversity and Multicultural Affairs Offices Websites.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed staff that support diversity and inclusion initiatives.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Institution A	Mid-Atlantic	5,900 / 12,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution B	Northeast	7,800 / 26,500	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution C	Pacific West	5,300 / 8,500	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
Institution D	South	18,500 / 29,300	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution E	Pacific West	6,400 / 10,000	Doctoral/Research Universities

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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